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AUTHOR Peterson, Elaine; Lou, Wei Wei
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ABSTRACT

In 1989 the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools conducted a Direct Writing Assessment of approximately 6,000 students. A voluntary portion included 103 ninth graders who wrote essays on the same topic. The papers were scored twice: once in each student's handwriting and once in word-processed form. Papers were separated into short and long categories and examined for the traits of: (1) ideas and content, (2) organization; (3) voice; (4) word choice; (5) sentence fluency; and (6) conventions. Short papers were seldom rated higher than long ones. For both handwritten and word-processed papers, no short paper rated "high" in total score. In the individual traits, only 1% of papers were rated high, while 17% were rated low. Long papers received 9% high scores and 6% low scores. For individual traits in the long papers, 4% were rated low, while 18% were rated high. However, long papers did not always outscore short papers, as both received a large concentration of middle scores. Results were mixed for long handwritten and word-processed papers. Scores were comparable for most traits, with the exception of organization and conventions. For short papers, scoring patterns were similar for all six traits. It is concluded that many factors impact writing and the scoring of writing papers and more studies are needed on direct writing assessment for scores to be used wisely. (Three appendixes contain assessment data and a fourth appendix provides the analytic rating guide). (SG)

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THE IMPACT OF LENGTH ON HANDWRITTEN AND WORDPROCESSED PAPERS

by

Elaine Peterson, Evaluation Specialist
Wei Wei Lou, Specialist for Design and Analysis
Research & Evaluation Department
Portland Public Schools
Portland, Oregon

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Oregon Education Research Association, October 1991.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of length (wordcount) on raters' scores for students' handwritten and wordprocessed Direct Writing Assessment papers. The objectives are to examine three questions:

For students' *handwritten* papers, do raters score long papers higher than short papers?

For students' *wordprocessed* papers, do raters score long papers higher than short papers?

Is there a difference in raters' scores between handwritten and wordprocessed papers for long or short?

As many researchers have noted, length is an important variable in scoring handwritten writing assessments. This study addresses both handwritten and wordprocessed papers.

PROCEDURES

In Fall 1989 Portland Public Schools conducted a Direct Writing Assessment for approximately 6,000 students: 3,000 fourth grade students in a districtwide program and 3,000 students in grades 3-12 in a voluntary assessment. The voluntary assessment included a subset of 103 ninth grade students from the same high school who had written essays on

the same topic. These students' papers were the focus of our study.

The 103 papers were scored twice--in each student's handwritten form and the wordprocessed form. The handwritten papers were wordprocessed by district clerks with the writers' mistakes included. They were then stapled inside writing assessment booklets and the identifying information was completed on the front covers identically to the handwritten papers. All papers--handwritten and wordprocessed--were blind scored.

Because the same essay was scored a minimum of four times--twice in the handwritten form and twice in the wordprocessed form--the papers were separated into stacks for each rater. A distribution process ensured that no rater scored the same essay in both forms and that each rater received an equal number of wordprocessed papers during the total scoring session. The papers were also randomly divided so that half of the papers in the handwritten form were scored before their corresponding wordprocessed form; conversely, half of the wordprocessed papers were scored before their corresponding handwritten form.

The scoring session included retraining on the analytical scoring guide and whole-group scoring to calibrate as a team. The two-hour retraining session was scheduled on the first morning, with additional group scoring conducted throughout the entire session. In addition, raters could conference with their scoring team leader on individual papers. The high school team leader was an experienced rater/trainer who, in addition to individual counselling with raters as needed, conducted small-group sharing of selected papers.

After the papers were scored, clerks counted the words in each student's paper. The data entered included student name and identification number, two sets of scores for each of the six writing traits, and wordcount.

THE PROMPT

The same prompt for the 103 student papers eliminated variables introduced by multiple topics. The comparison here between long and short papers is appropriate to the extent that raters graded both long and short papers based on the same characteristics and requirements pertinent to the same prompt. Students wrote on the following "Successful Person" topic:

> Think of a person who you believe is successful. Explain in as much detail as you can what it is that you believe makes that person a success. Consider and use your own definition of success.

THE SAMPLE

In this writing assessment, each high school student chose one of three prompts. This particular high school submitted papers in all three prompts, of which the "Successful Person" prompt had 108 papers. Four of these papers were upperclassmen, and were

omitted from the sample. Of the remaining 104 ninth grade papers, one was mistakenly omitted in the wordcount, leaving a total of 103 papers in the study.

The sample population were students from a high performing high school compared to other high schools in Portland Public Schools and the state of Oregon. Approximately sixty percent of the students had attended a high performing middle school within the high school's attendance boundaries. The remaining forty percent of the student body were district transfer students to an international studies magnet program that requires four years of study in a foreign language.

All language arts teachers in the middle school and most of those in the high school were trained in scoring Direct Writing Assessments. Both schools actively supported writing assessments in the district, both by submitting papers for the voluntary sessions and--especially the middle school--by releasing teachers to score papers. Teachers were familiar with the Writing Process, and the student version of the analytical rating guide was available to students.

THE RATERS

A team of ten high school teachers scored all high school papers, including the study's handwritten and wordprocessed papers. All raters had completed a two day training session--one day in training and one day of scoring--prior to this scoring session. The

degree of rater experience beyond this varied; some had not scored since that time while others were master raters and trainers.

Initially, the raters were not informed of the study in order to avoid bias or overcompensation in scoring. However the raters discovered duplicate papers at midpoint in the scoring session when one rater who had finished scoring her stack of papers helped another. At that point, they asked clarification on whether a student's paper had been mistakenly submitted twice or whether *they* were being studied. When they understood that the purpose of the study was to compare scores of handwritten and wordprocessed papers, all raters felt comfortable in continuing to score.

SCORES

The rating scale is from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Each paper was scored twice and, if the scores for any one trait differed by more than one point, that paper was scored a third time. That third set of scores then replaced the scores for both the first and second raters for the discrepant trait. The two scores for each writing trait were averaged (mean), and that averaged score became the reported score. For example, if two raters assigned scores of 3 and 4 respectively, those two scores would be averaged and 3.5 would be the reported score for that trait.

Each paper received six scores, one for each of the six writing traits: Ideas and

Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. A copy of the analytical scoring guide is attached. (See Appendix D)

ANALYSIS

The 103 papers were divided into three groups according to length, which ranged from 57 to 879 words. Short papers (N=35) ranged from 57-217 words, mid-length papers (N=34) ranged from 218-310 words, and long papers (N=34) from 311-879. Although the groups were arbitrarily divided, a T-test was done to test the validity of such a division. (See Appendix A) High correlation was found between scores and paper length.

For discussion purposes, the scores are labeled Low (1.0-2.5), Middle (3.0-4.0), and High (4.5-5.0). The analytical rating guide defined 3.0 as the mid-point, or a balance of strengths and weaknesses. However, the middle range for this study was defined higher due to the unique characteristics of the sample population. The sample population was higher performing, which was reflected in the mean scores. Of 24 mean scores, 23 were above 3.0. Only one mean was below that point, at 2.9, and twelve were above 3.5. Therefore, the conservative approach was taken to define middle scores from 3.0 to 4.0. If a less conservation definition of middle scores were used, the results would be even more pronounced than reported in this paper.

For this analysis, the comparison was done between long and short papers, handwritten

or wordprocessed. The T-test showed a significant difference between the two groups. From the Total mean computed for short papers and long papers for both handwritten and wordprocessed papers, a statistically significant conclusion can be made that short and long papers yielded different scores for both handwritten and wordprocessed papers. In general, short papers received considerably lower scores than long papers for both handwritten and wordprocessed papers. In other words, there was a strong tendency for long papers to be rated higher than short papers.

The same conclusion applies to the six individual writing traits for *handwritten* papers. For all of the traits--Ideas & Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions--the conclusion that short and long papers received different scores was statistically significant.

The same conclusion generally applies to the individual writing traits for *wordprocessed* papers with one exception--Conventions. For Ideas & Content, Organization, and Voice, the conclusion that short and long papers received different scores was statistically significant. For Word Choice it was less significant; for Sentence Fluency it was even less significant. The exception--Conventions--showed no significant difference.

DISCUSSION

It is clear that short papers were seldom rated higher than long papers. (See Appendix B, C) For both handwritten and wordprocessed papers, no short paper rated High in Total score. For short papers in the individual traits, only two handwritten papers and four wordprocessed papers were rated High out of 420 scores for short papers, or 1%. On the other hand, short papers were rated Low in 70 out of 420 trait scores, or .17%. Clearly, short papers received more Low scores than High and, in fact, rarely received High scores.

The results were somewhat different for long papers. For both handwritten and wordprocessed papers for Total, long papers received 9% High scores and 6% Low scores. For long papers in the individual traits, fifteen papers were rated Low out of 408 trait scores, or 4%, and 75 papers were rated High, or .18%. So generally, longer papers received more High scores than Low scores. But there were exceptions. For certain traits--Organization and Conventions--the frequency distribution showed a wide range of scores. This also occurred to a lesser degree in wordprocessed Sentence Fluency and wordprocessed Word Choice. So while long papers generally received more High scores than Low scores, long papers were not exclusively rater higher.

While short papers generally received lower scores than long papers for both handwritten and wordprocessed, care must be given in making any conclusions that short papers were always scored Low and long papers were always scored High. There was a

wide distribution of scores for both short and long papers, with considerable overlapping. Both short and long papers received a large concentration of middle scores.

In comparing scores for long papers between handwritten and wordprocessed forms, the results were mixed. Scores were generally comparable for most traits--that is, long papers received more High scores than Low scores in handwritten and wordprocessed forms. This was strongest for Ideas & Content and Voice, and was less strong for Word Choice and Sentence Fluency. The exceptions were Organization and Conventions, in which scores for handwritten and wordprocessed papers were not similar.

In comparing scores for short papers between handwritten and wordprocessed forms, the pattern was generally the same for all six traits. That is, short papers received more Low scores than High scores. This was weakest for wordprocessed Conventions, in which seventeen percent received Low scores and six percent received High scores. Otherwise, the tendency was strong.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that raters' scores differ between long and short papers for both handwritten and wordprocessed forms. While long and short papers received a wide range of scores, long papers received more High scores than short papers. Short papers were rarely rated High.

When raters' scores were compared between handwritten and wordprocessed forms for short papers, there was no difference. Raters' scores for short papers were similar for handwritten and wordprocessed papers; that is, they were rarely rated High.

When raters' scores were compared between handwritten and wordprocessed forms for long papers, the results were mixed. Most traits showed the same general pattern for both handwritten and wordprocessed, which is that long papers received more High scores than Low scores. The most notable exception was wordprocessed Conventions.

During the debriefing session, raters stated that scoring conventions was easier in the wordprocessed papers than in handwritten papers. Their comments were that errors in conventions--paragraphing, misspelled words, errors in capitalization and punctuation, and the like--were easier to spot. The errors "jumped out at them" in the wordprocessed form. This may also be a factor contributing to other traits that are also easier to "see" in the wordprocessed form, such as Organization.

Since the definition of short or long papers was relative and arbitrarily defined in this study, as well as Low and High scores, care must be given in using this analysis for instructional situations. Many factors impact writing and the scoring of writing papers, and using a 5-point scoring scale is limiting. The impact of length on raters' scores, particularly for wordprocessed papers, warrants further study.

MORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With increasing needs for multi-dimensional assessment, more studies are needed on Direct Writing Assessments for scores to be used wisely. For instance, we found in our study that scores for long and short papers show different tendencies in some traits than in others, such as Conventions and Organization. Does this indicate any correlation between paper length and traits, rather than a correlation between paper length and scores? Do differences arise more from the particular scoring criteria for those traits, and are some traits more sensitive than others to the amounts of information in long and short papers? Does the scoring criteria fail to serve short papers in general, rather than short papers exhibiting lower quality? Finally, can students who submit papers from their wordprocessors be assured their scores will be comparable to students who submit handwritten papers?

T-TEST: Long and Short Papers

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Comparison of Paper Length & Scores
Direct Writing Assessment
Short & Long Papers

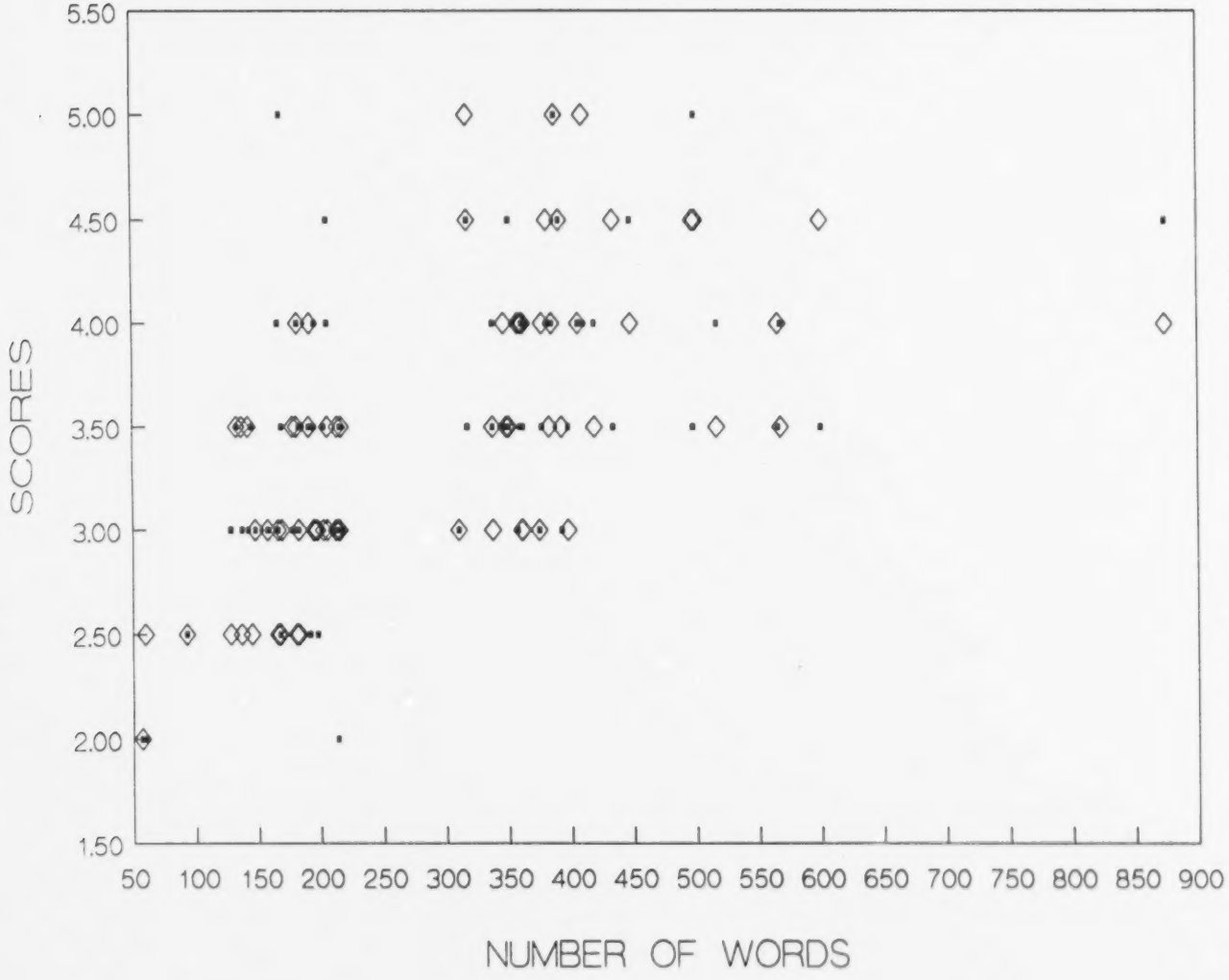
Ideas & Content	Handwritten Papers		Wordprocessed Papers		Organization	Handwritten Papers		Wordprocessed Papers	
Rating	Short	Long	Short	Long	Rating	Short	Long	Short	Long
2.00	1		2		2.00	1	2	2	2
2.50	9		5		2.50	9	2	6	
3.00	15	6	14	4	3.00	13	8	17	8
3.50	8	8	9	12	3.50	10	5	7	10
4.00	2	10	3	11	4.00	1	12	3	7
4.50		7	1	5	4.50	1	4		3
5.00		3	1	2	5.00		1		4
	Handwritten		Wordprocessed			Handwritten		Wordprocessed	
1.00 to 2.50	29%	0%	20%	0%	1.00 to 2.50	29%	12%	23%	6%
3.00 to 4.00	71%	71%	74%	79%	3.00 to 4.00	69%	74%	77%	74%
4.50 to 5.00	0%	29%	6%	21%	4.50 to 5.00	3%	15%	0%	21%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Voice					Word Choice				
2.00	1		1		2.00	1			
2.50	3	1	2		2.50	4		1	1
3.00	14	5	15	4	3.00	28	14	28	14
3.50	14	12	13	9	3.50	2	10	5	9
4.00	2	5	4	14	4.00		7	1	7
4.50		7		4	4.50		2		1
5.00	1	4		3	5.00		1		2
	Handwritten		Wordprocessed			Handwritten		Wordprocessed	
1.00 to 2.50	11%	3%	9%	0%	1.00 to 2.50	14%	0%	3%	3%
3.00 to 4.00	86%	65%	91%	79%	3.00 to 4.00	86%	91%	97%	88%
4.50 to 5.00	3%	32%	0%	21%	4.50 to 5.00	0%	9%	0%	9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Sentence Fluency					Conventions				
2.00					2.00	4		2	1
2.50	4		3	2	2.50	5	2	4	2
3.00	23	12	19	10	3.00	14	8	16	10
3.50	5	8	12	10	3.50	9	11	8	10
4.00	3	7	1	8	4.00	3	5	3	8
4.50		7		2	4.50		5	1	1
5.00				2	5.00		3	1	2
	Handwritten		Wordprocessed			Handwritten		Wordprocessed	
1.00 to 2.50	11%	0%	9%	6%	1.00 to 2.50	26%	6%	17%	9%
3.00 to 4.00	89%	79%	91%	82%	3.00 to 4.00	74%	71%	77%	82%
4.50 to 5.00	0%	21%	0%	12%	4.50 to 5.00	0%	24%	6%	9%

Wordcount & Total Scores: Long and Short Papers

	Handwritten		Wordprocessed			Handwritten		Wordprocessed	
2.00			1		1.00 to 2.50	29%	6%	37%	6%
2.50	10	2	12	2	3.00 to 4.00	71%	85%	63%	85%
3.00	20	11	18	13	4.50 to 5.00	0%	9%	0%	9%
3.50	5	12	4	8					
4.00		6		8					
4.50		3		3					
5.00									

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: IDEAS AND CONTENT



Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	29%	0%
3.00–4.00	71%	71%
4.50–5.00	0%	29%

Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	20%	0%
3.00–4.00	74%	79%
4.50–5.00	6%	21%

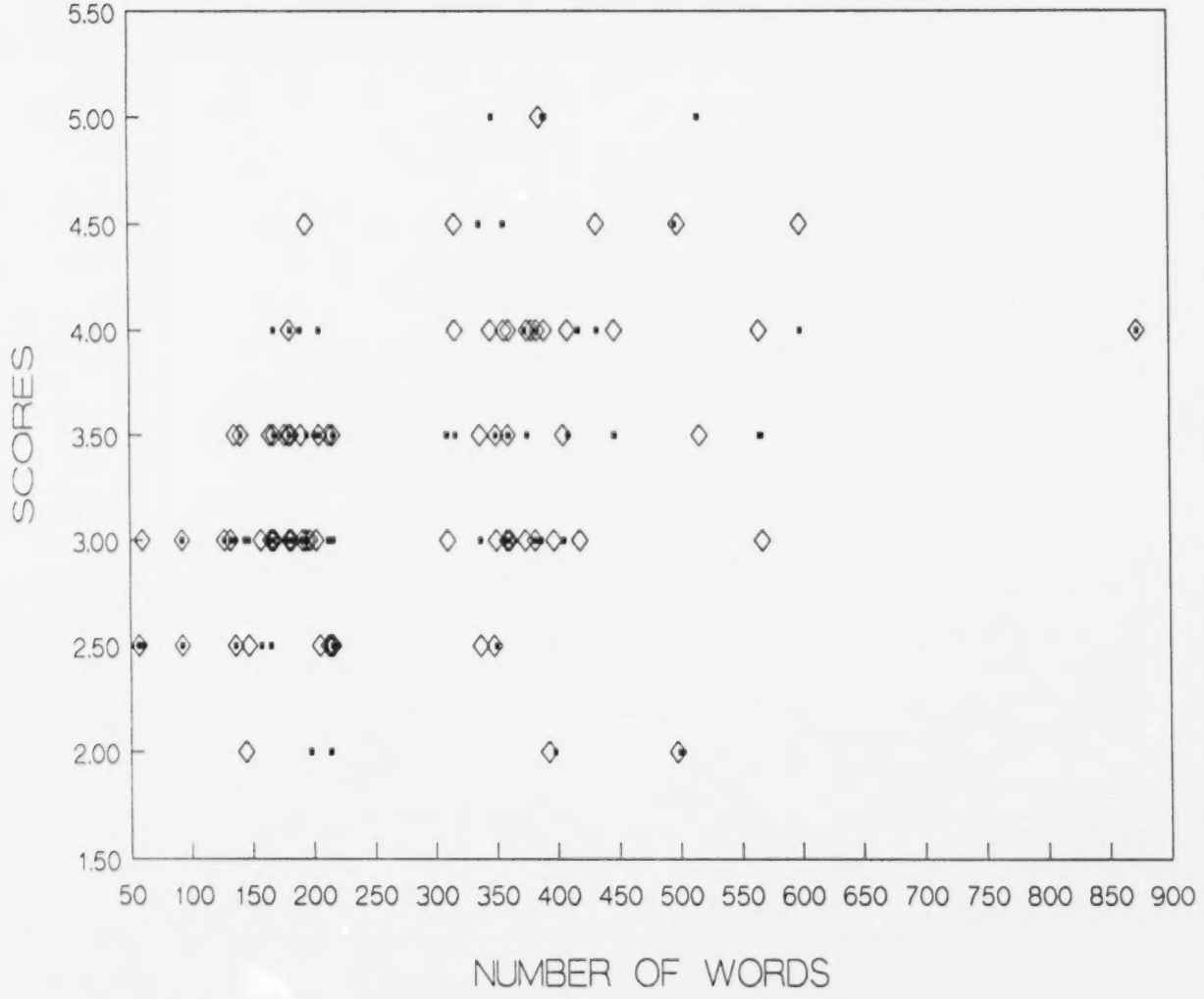
◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.01
Long paper mean = 3.90

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.19
Long paper mean = 3.84

APPENDIX C

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: ORGANIZATION



◊ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.06
Long paper mean = 3.57

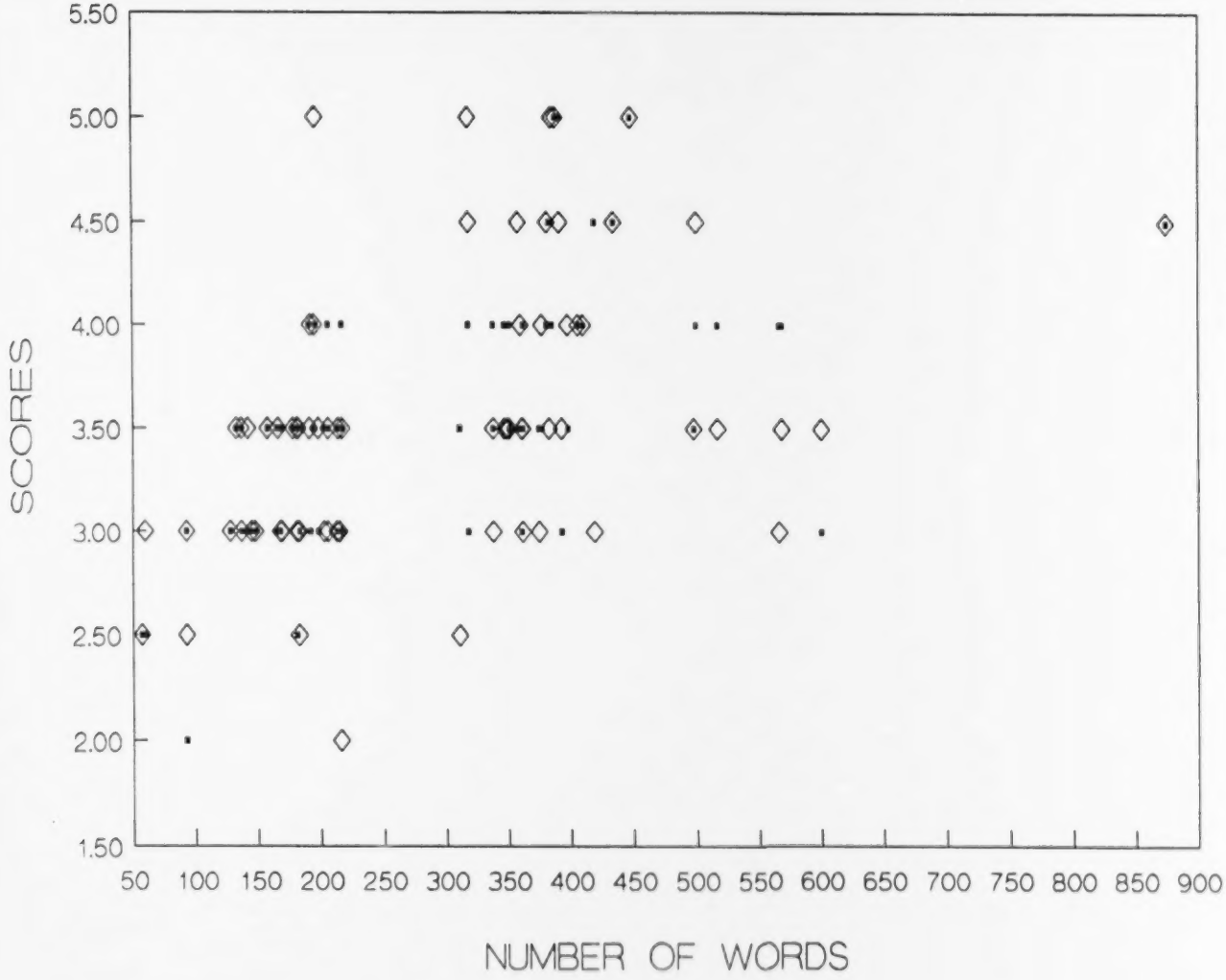
■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.04
Long paper mean = 3.66

Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	29%	11%
3.00–4.00	68%	74%
4.50–5.00	3%	15%

Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	23%	6%
3.00–4.00	77%	74%
4.50–5.00	0%	20%

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: VOICE



Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	11%	3%
3.00–4.00	86%	65%
4.50–5.00	3%	32%

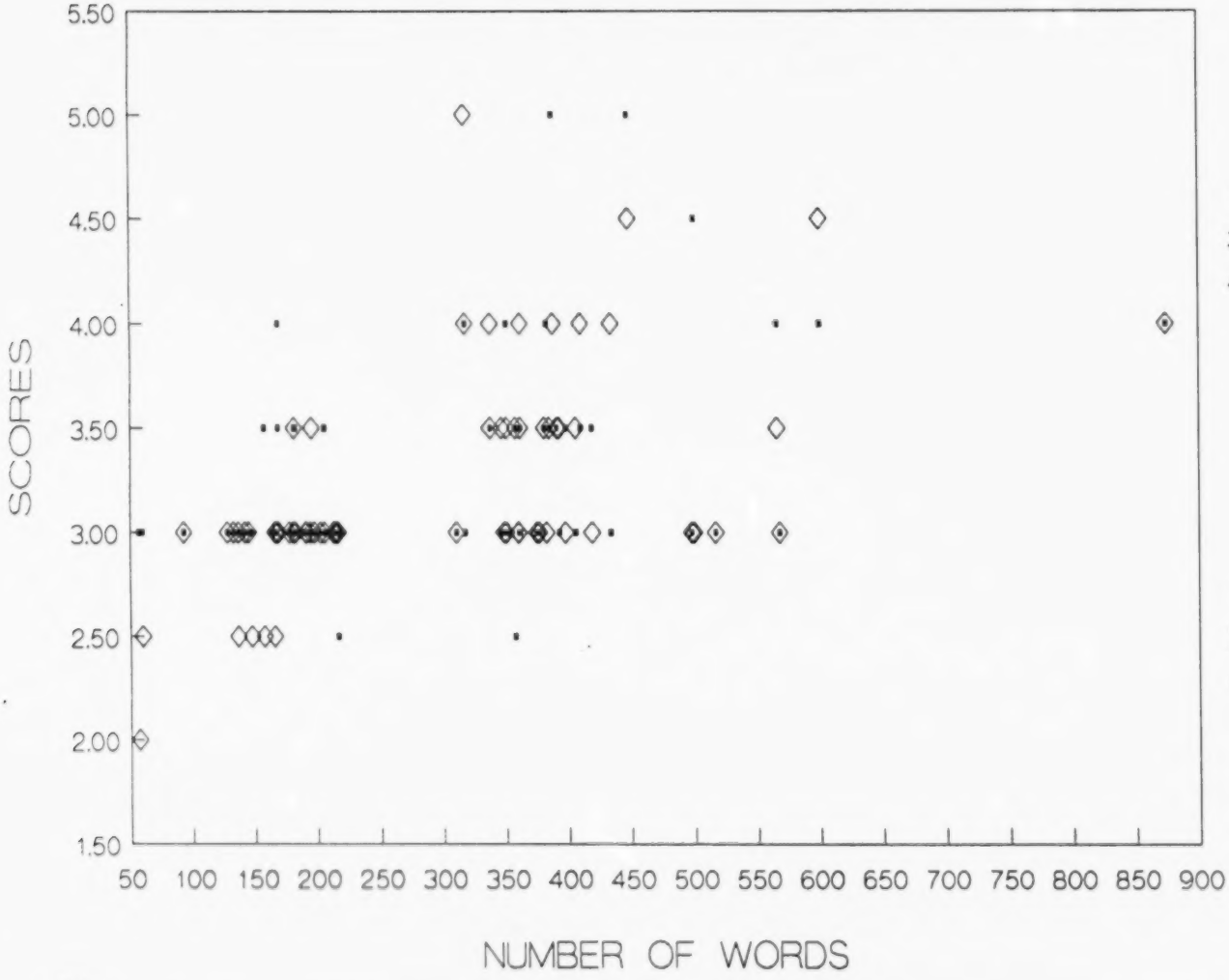
Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	9%	0%
3.00–4.00	91%	79%
4.50–5.00	0%	21%

◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.24
Long paper mean = 3.85

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.24
Long paper mean = 3.89

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: WORD CHOICE



	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	14%	0%
3.00–4.00	86%	91%
4.50–5.00	0%	9%

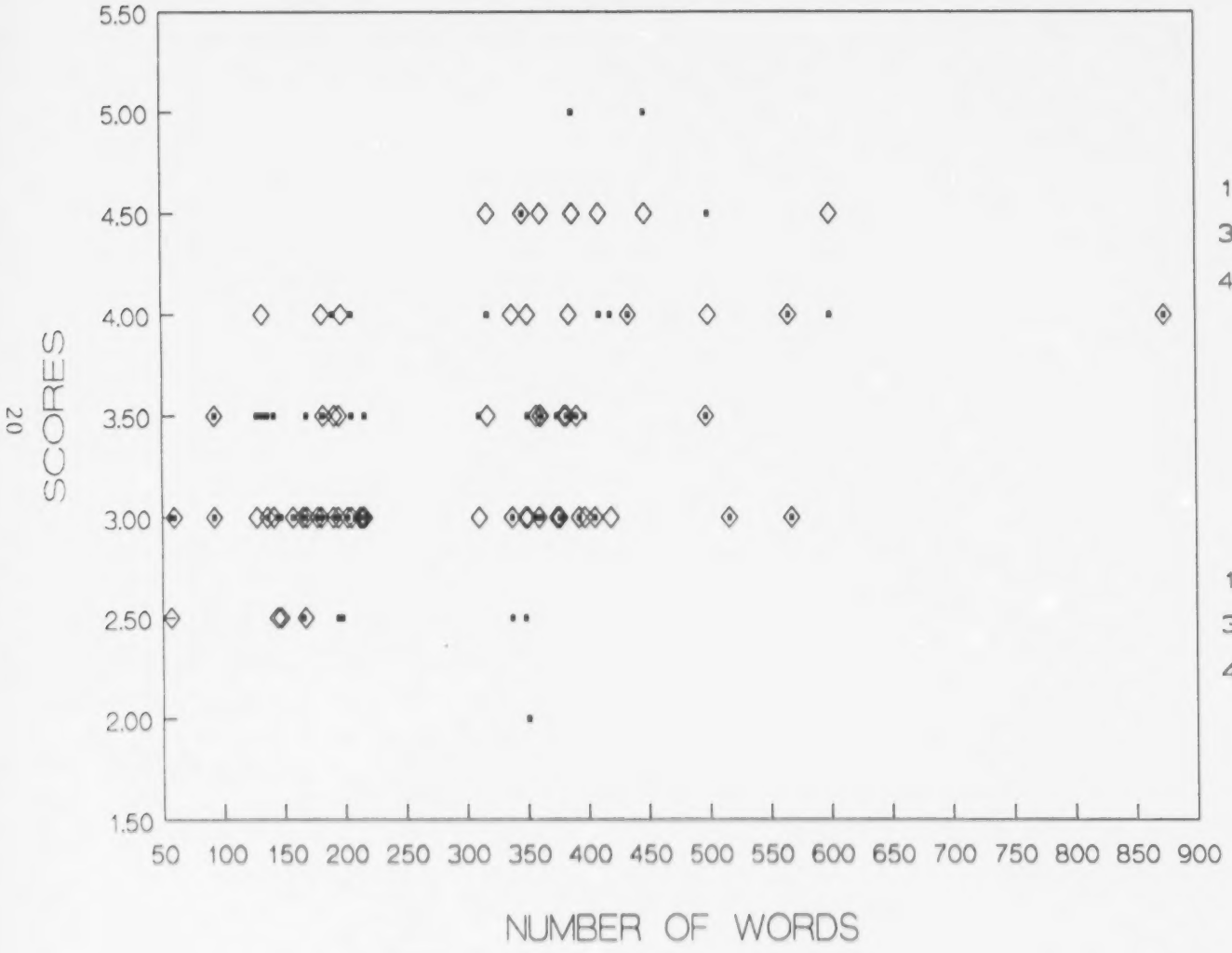
	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	3%	3%
3.00–4.00	97%	88%
4.50–5.00	0%	9%

◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 2.94
Long paper mean = 3.50

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.08
Long paper mean = 3.49

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: SENTENCE FLUENCY



Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	12%	0%
3.00–4.00	88%	79%
4.50–5.00	0%	21%

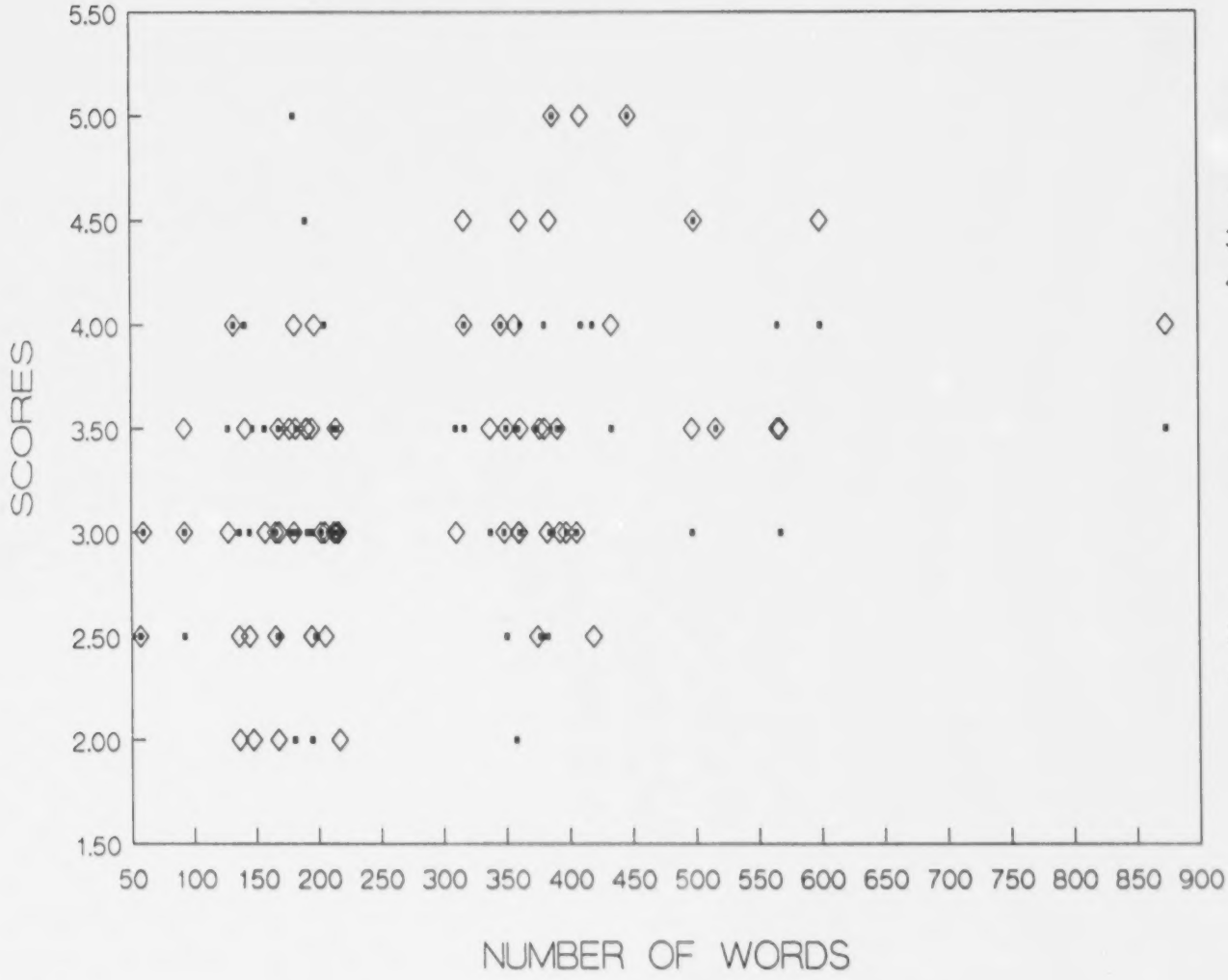
Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	9%	6%
3.00–4.00	91%	82%
4.50–5.00	0%	12%

◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.10
Long paper mean = 3.63

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.16
Long paper mean = 3.56

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & SCORES: CONVENTIONS



Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00–2.50	26%	6%
3.00–4.00	74%	71%
4.50–5.00	0%	23%

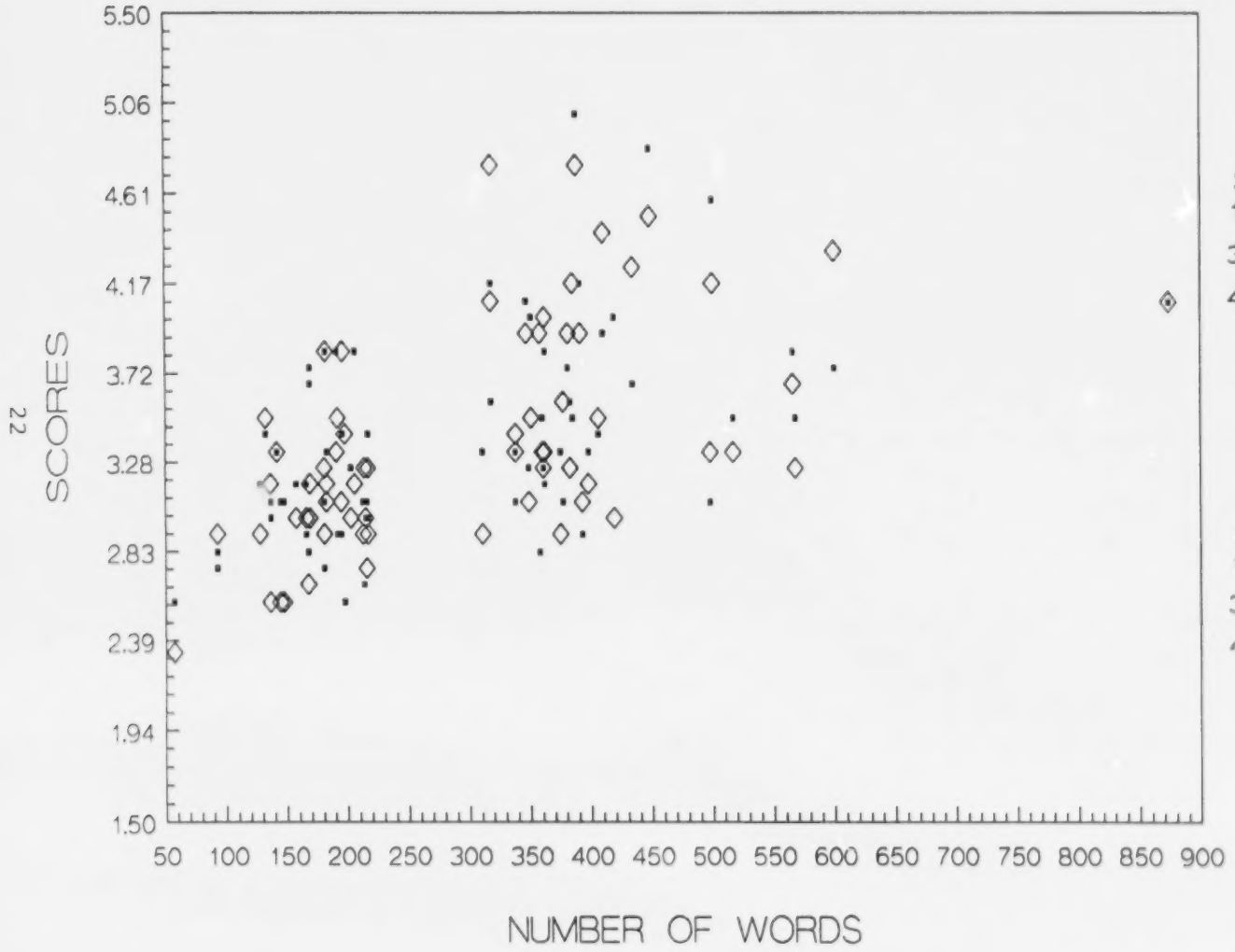
Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00–2.50	17%	9%
3.00–4.00	77%	82%
4.50–5.00	6%	9%

◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.03
Long paper mean = 3.68

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.19
Long paper mean = 3.49

DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

WORDCOUNT & TOTAL SCORES: LONG & SHORT



Scores	Handwritten Short	Handwritten Long
1.00-2.50	29%	6%
3.00-4.00	71%	85%
4.50-5.00	0%	9%

Scores	Wordprocessed Short	Wordprocessed Long
1.00-2.50	37%	6%
3.00-4.00	63%	85%
4.50-5.00	0%	9%

◇ Handwritten
Short paper mean = 3.06
Long paper mean = 3.69

■ Wordprocessed
Short paper mean = 3.15
Long paper mean = 3.65

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

6-TRAIT ANALYTIC RATING GUIDE

IDEAS/CONTENT

5 **This paper is clear in purpose and conveys ideas in an interesting, original manner that holds the reader's attention. Clear, relevant examples, anecdotes or details develop and enrich the central idea(s).**

a. The writing demonstrates depth of knowledge of the topic.
b. The writing shows insight -- a good sense of the world, people, situations.
c. The writer selects supportive, relevant details that keep the main idea(s) in focus.
d. Primary and secondary ideas are developed in proportion to their significance.
e. The writer has control of the topic and its development throughout.

3 **This paper is reasonably clear in purpose. At times the paper holds the reader's attention. Some support develops the main ideas.**

a. The writer shows some knowledge of the topic or has considered ideas, but has not thought things through all the way.
b. The writing demonstrates limited insight.
c. Ideas, though reasonably clear and comprehensible, tend toward the mundane.
d. Supporting details are skimpy, general, predictable, or repetitive. Some details seem included by chance, not selected through careful discrimination.
e. Writing may give too much attention to minor details, insufficient development of main ideas, informational gaps.
f. The writer's control of the topic is inconsistent or uncertain.

1 **This paper lacks a central purpose or idea .. . or the central idea can be inferred by the reader only because he or she knows the topic (question asked).**

a. The writing demonstrates little knowledge of the topic (e.g., restatement of the prompt, heavy reliance on repetition) or is simply unclear altogether.
b. The writing lacks insight.
c. Development of ideas is minimal, or there may be a list of random thoughts from which no central theme emerges.
d. Writing reads like a rote response -- merely an effort to get something down on paper.
e. The writer has no control of the topic, and shorter papers tend to go nowhere.

ORGANIZATION

5 **The writer organizes material in a way that enhances the reader's understanding, or that helps to develop a central idea or theme. The order may be conventional or not, but the sequence is effective and moves the reader through the paper.**

a. The writer's choice and use of mode (narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative) enhance the topic.
b. The paper has an inviting introduction and a satisfying conclusion.
c. Relevant details are arranged selectively to provide impact and interest.
d. Transitions work well. Organization (between and within paragraphs) flows so smoothly that the reader doesn't have to think about it.
e. The writing shows unity and cohesion, within paragraphs and as a whole.

3 **The writer attempts to organize ideas and details cohesively, but the resulting pattern may be somewhat unclear, ineffective, or awkward. Although the reader can generally follow what's being said, the organizational structure may seem at times to be forced, obvious, incomplete or ineffective.**

a. The writer's choice and use of mode vary in effectiveness.
b. The paper has a beginning and an ending, but they are less effective than desired.
c. Placement or relevance of some details may be questionable (e.g., interruptive information; writer gets to the point in a roundabout fashion; supporting details may be missing).
d. Use or lack of transitions require the reader to make some assumptions or inferences.
e. The paper is fairly cohesive; some parts are tighter and better organized than others.

1 **Organization is haphazard and disjointed. The writing shows little or no sense of progression or direction. Examples, details, or events seem unrelated to any central idea, or may be strung together helter-skelter with no apparent pattern.**

a. The writer's use of mode confuses the reader.
b. The paper has no clear sense of beginning or ending.
c. Arrangement of details is confusing and illogical; noticeable information gaps occur.
d. Transitions are very weak or absent altogether.
e. The paper lacks unity and solidarity.

5 **The paper bears the unmistakable stamp of the individual writer. The writer is committed to the topic, and involves the reader. The overall effect is individualistic and expressive. This paper stands out from the others.**

a. The paper communicates honestly, even when it means taking a risk (e.g., unexpected approach, revealing of self.)
b. The writing is natural and brings the topic to life.
c. Tone is appropriate and consistently controlled.
d. The reader feels an interaction with the writer, and gains a sense of the writer's enthusiasm, interest, and individuality.

3 **The writer deals honestly with the topic, but without a strong sense of personal commitment or involvement. Voice may emerge strongly on occasion, only to shift or fade. The writing tends to blend in with the efforts of others.**

a. The writing communicates in a routine, predictable fashion.
b. The writing is pleasant or acceptable (but perhaps not striking or compelling).
c. Tone may be inconsistent.
d. The reader has only an occasional or limited sense of interaction with the writer.

1 **The writer may not have understood the assignment, or may simply have felt indifferent toward the topic. No clear voice emerges.**

a. The writing has virtually no individual personality or character.
b. The writing is flat, lifeless, mechanical, stilted, or possibly inappropriate.
c. Tone is inappropriate or erratic.
d. The reader has no sense that this writer was "writing to be read," and experiences virtually no writer-reader interaction.

5 **The writer consistently selects words that convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and natural way. The result is full and rich, yet concise; words carry their own weight.**

a. Words are specific, accurate, and suited to the subject. Imagery is strong.
b. Lively, powerful verbs give the writing energy, sensory appeal, and clarity.
c. Vocabulary is striking, colorful, or unusual -- but the language isn't overdone.
d. Expression is fresh and appealing, fun to read. The writer uses cliches or slang sparingly, and only for effect.
e. The writer may experiment with uncommon words, or use common words in a delightful way.
f. Imagery, if used, is effective.

3 **The writer's word choice is adequate to convey meaning, but the language is quite ordinary. The writer doesn't reach for the "best" way to say something, but often settles for the first word or phrase that comes to mind. The result is a sort of "generic paper" that sounds familiar, routine, or commonplace.**

a. The paper communicates with abstract, general language, without a sense of satisfying fullness or power; the reader feels it could have been written better.
b. Most verbs are commonplace.
c. Though the reader can interpret the meaning readily, some words lack precision.
d. The writer may attempt the unusual, colorful, or difficult, with mixed results.
e. Though an occasional phrase may catch the reader's eye, cliches, redundancies and hackneyed phrases may occur; there are few surprises or enticing twists.
f. Imagery may be weak or inappropriate.

1 **The writer is struggling with a limited vocabulary, often groping for words and phrases to convey meaning. Meaning may be difficult to determine (e.g., the writer says one thing but seems to mean another), or else the language is so vague and abstract that only the broadest, most general sorts of messages are conveyed.**

a. Words are simplistic, dull, colorless, and trite. There is virtually no effort to try what's new.
b. Verbs tend to be repetitive and simplistic.
c. Writing is often characterized by monotonous repetition, overwhelming reliance on worn, threadbare expressions, or heavy reliance on the prompt (topic assignment) itself for key words and phrases.
d. In some instances, word choice may seem careless, imprecise, or just plain wrong.
e. Imagery is absent; the reader lacks sufficient concrete details to form any mental picture.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

5 **The paper is fluid, and reads easily throughout. It has an easy-on-the-ear flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences tend to be mature and sophisticated for grade level, with a strong and varied structure that makes reading enjoyable.**

a. Sentences clearly and effectively convey meaning and show how ideas relate.
b. Writing sounds natural and fluent, with effective word patterns, phrases and combinations that enhance style.
c. Writing is appropriately concise, not wordy.
d. Varied sentence structure and length add interest.
e. Appropriate syntax is used.

3 **The paper is understandable, but the sentences tend to be mechanical rather than fluid. Appropriate syntax is generally used. Fragments (if used) seem the result of oversight.**

a. Sentences usually convey meaning and relationships between ideas.
b. The writer shows control with simple sentence structure, and variable control with more complex patterns.
c. Sentence variety (length or structure) tends to be the exception, not the rule.

1 **The paper is often difficult to understand and difficult to read aloud. Sentences tend to be choppy, incomplete, or so rambling and irregular that it may be hard to tell where one should end and the next begin.**

a. Sentences lack both correctness and fluency; they may seem disjointed, awkward, endlessly meandering, or nonsensical.
b. Sentences may tend to follow relentlessly monotonous rhythms or pattern (e.g., subject-verb or subject-verb-object over and over).
c. Inappropriate syntax is common, and meaning is not clear.
d. The writer does not distinguish between fragments and complete sentences.

CONVENTIONS

The conventions trait includes: grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and paragraphing.

5 **The writer's skillful use of standard writing conventions enhances readability. There are no glaring errors. The paper may not be flawless, but errors tend to be so minor that the reader can easily overlook them.**

a. Grammar (e.g., agreement, verb tense) is essentially correct.
b. Punctuation is smooth and enhances meaning. Informalities, such as dashes or contractions, are allowed.
c. Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words.
d. Usage is generally correct or acceptable given the purpose of the writing. The writer avoids double negatives and nonstandard usage (e.g., could of been, more better, irregardless.) Informalities are acceptable (e.g., you will find, rather than the more formal one will find.)
e. Paragraphing (i.e., indenting) works with the inherent organization of the paper.

3 **Errors in writing conventions are noticeable and somewhat distracting. Readers can follow what is being said overall, but may need to pause or re-read on occasion.**

a. Occasional problems in grammar disrupt the flow of the writing. For example, agreement may be inconsistent; or there may be shifts in tense, improper verb forms, improper pronoun forms, use of adjectives for adverbs, and so on.
b. Punctuation, capitalization and spelling errors may be sufficiently frequent or serious to momentarily upstage the message.
c. Some usage problems may be evident (e.g., double negatives, use of nonstandard expressions such as irregardless.)
d. Paragraphing is attempted, but paragraphs may not always begin at the right places. As a result, indentation does not always complement the paper's inherent organization.

1 **Numerous errors consistently distract the reader, taking attention away from the writer's message and severely impairing readability.**

a. The writer shows very limited understanding of or ability to apply conventions.
b. Frequent errors in grammar and usage obscure the writer's meaning.
c. Basic punctuation may be omitted, haphazard, or just plain wrong.
d. Capitalization is often incorrect or highly inconsistent.
e. Spelling errors tend to be frequent, even on common words.
f. Paragraphing is illogical or arbitrary (e.g., paragraphs almost never seem to begin in the right places.)